

To Legislators on the proposed cuts to the Deaf Services:

I am Rachel Spillane, Director of Deaf Outreach Services at FSW in Bridgeport, CT. I have worked in the Deaf Community in various capacities for 40 years. I am also a certified interpreter.

I would like to offer the following comments concerning the Governor's proposed cuts that will impact the Deaf Community:

1. Under the Governor's proposal, CDHI will close all of their departments and only the interpreting services dept. will continue under DSS. That means no counseling/case management services will be offered in the Hartford area. FSW offers counseling and case management services but we service clients located mainly in the southern half of the state. DSS has cut funding to our services and we only have one case manager and one part time counselor to deal with approximately 50-100 cases per year. There is no way we can accommodate the loss of services in the Hartford area especially with the funding cuts we have already absorbed from the state and be expected to service additional clients with one case manager and one part time counselor. Deaf clients that go to other counseling agencies will encounter counselors that neither sign nor understand the serious communication barriers that the deaf face on a daily basis. In addition those agencies do not have funds allocated within their budgets to pay for interpreting services. Many of these agencies, including state agencies will be in violation of ADA for their failure to provide equal access to deaf consumers. I propose that the one signing counselor that CDHI currently has to be included in the move to DSS, so that at least there will be some safety net of continued counseling services in the Hartford area.
2. The Governor has proposed funding cuts to American School for the Deaf. This educational institution needs to have its current funding maintained. Nowhere in the state do you have such a collaboration of experts in Deafness and the appropriate educational resources. Often times when deaf children are mainstreamed in the public school system, they are isolated and those deaf children face educators that have no knowledge or experience in educating a deaf child. Many times those children fail in the public school system and are placed at ASD after having lost valuable years of learning. ASD then faces the huge task of catching these children up with their peers who have had an uninterrupted and appropriate education at ASD.
3. I do have a suggestion about consolidating funding involving the Deaf Community in order to make the best use of resources: By the year 2012, The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) will require a four year degree in order to become a certified interpreter. Connecticut is facing an interpreter shortage and it would be a wise move to consolidate the sign language and interpreter training program into a 4 year degree institution that geographically has the ability to attract the highest number of students being enrolled This would be a win-win

situation, making the most use of the funding and further benefit the deaf community by providing a steady stream of new interpreters to service its needs.

Please consider my comments about this very specialized population that has special needs that can only be filled by the appropriate funding and experts in the field of Deafness.

Thank you for your consideration.

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